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ABSTRACT

An instrument for determining pupil's perception of teacher behaviors is described. The inventory asked pupils to respond to statements reflecting teacher behavior in four major aspects of teaching: relating to pupils; mediating the learning process; diagnosing and evaluating; and managing and structuring the learning environment. As a parallel activity, the teacher responds to the same items. This allows the teacher to tally student responses and identify those items where there was confusion between student responses and teacher responses. This perception inventory was used as a pivot for developing an inservice program for the improvement of teaching. The rationale for this program is that pupil perceptions, at any grade level, are relevant sources of information for the teacher interested in self-assessment and performance improvement. (JD)

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PUPIL PERCEPTIONS: MIRRORS FOR GROWTH I. TEACHING

Improving teaching performance never ceases to be a concern for professional educators at all levels. Systematic plans for self-improvement, small-team improvement, administrative evaluative processes and in-service training have existed in all districts throughout the United States with varying degrees of success. However, one very crucial aspect of teaching improvement has been frequently overlooked -- the use of student perceptions of the teacher's classroom performance as a tool for diagnosing the effects of the teacher's behavior. Few educators tap this valuable resource when pursuing approaches and methods for assisting teachers in their on-going professional up-grading process.

This article reports Drozda's study in which she used the Seaberg-Drozda Pupil Perception Inventory as a diagnostic tool to help in-service teachers gain clues to classroom practices that impede learning and motivation. Drozda (1976) developed a case study of Splinter who made dramatic changes in her teaching behavior using feedback from the SDPPI as a focus for identifying classroom concerns.

Drozda, in designing a strategy for using pupil feedback for the improvement of teaching, operated from the following assumptions:

1) What students have to say is valuable to the classroom teacher.

2) The pupil is a reliable source of the pupil's own perceptions.

3) Pupil perceptions provide feedback to help the teacher understand how that teacher's performance is affecting the student at a <u>feeling</u> level; therefore pupil perceptions can be useful in getting at the affective dimension of the classroom.

4) The teacher is a facilitating agent and therefore has responsibility to examine student perceptions in order to create an appropriate environment in which the student develops a positive view of himself, thereby promoting holistic learning.

Use of Pupil Perceptions for Studying Teaching

Formal studies of pupil perceptions of teacher behavior is scant. However, the few educators who have used such data suggest that student perceptions are accurate and reliable. Lederman, feeling strongly about the value of student perceptions, said: "Feedback from my students provided me with a dimension of my teaching that no observer or committee could have given me." (Lederman, 1974, p. 247). Medley and Klein (1957) and Thompson (1974) have also pointed out the benefit to classroom teachers of knowing how pupils perceive them and the classroom activities.

Leeds (1954); Steele, House and Kerins (1971); Anderson (1973); Shymansky (1974) and Seaberg (1972) have explored different types of inventories for looking at teacher behavior through the use of student perceptions. Each of these researchers approached the task with different assumptions. Although all offered interesting approaches, Drozda chose to refine Seaberg's Pupil Perception Inventory, which had never been tested in practice, and to use it as a pivot for developing an in-service program for the improvement of teaching.

Comprehensive in scope, Seaberg's unpublished Inventory was developed from a model for studying teaching in which she looked at the critical functions teachers fulfill in the classroom as they create environments for learning (Seaberg, 1974). The Inventory asked pupils to respond to statements reflecting teacher behavior in four major aspects of teaching: relating to pupils; mediating the learning process; diagnosing and evaluating; and managing and structuring the learning environment. Seaberg's Inventory used paired opposite statements such as the following:

_____ My teacher likes my ideas.
_____ My teacher usually doesn't like my ideas.

_____ My teacher is usually fair to me.
_____ My teacher is not fair to me.

_____ My teacher is interested in what I say.
_____ My teacher isn't interested in what I say.

_____ I know what my teacher expects from me.
_____ I'm not sure what my teacher expects from me.

The statements reflect concepts such as caring, encouragement, trust, shared decision making, purpose, involvement, individualization, feelings of competence, class interaction, choice, structure, feelings about teacher judgment, stimulation vs. boredom, freedom vs. constriction, teacher expectations, and class atmosphere.

Refinement of the Seaberg-Drozda Pupil Perception Inventory

After studying the few inventories available, Drozda prepared a systematic plan for refining Seaberg's Pupil Perception Inventory. (Seaberg had originally prepared four separate Inventories with two forms each.) A variety of steps were planned to refine the instrument and then to use it in in-service work. Elementary classroom teachers, elementary school students, and graduate education students were used to review the inventory. A large northern Illinois school district was invited to participate in the entire study. Permission was granted and letters of invitation were sent to all fourth, fifth and sixth grade teachers in that district. When teachers responded, plans for the refinement and use of the Inventory were finalized. After going through a series of four revisions, the Inventory now named the Seaberg-Drozda Pupil Perception Inventory had two forms, Form A and Form B. Form A consists of seventy-seven items for students' "Yes" - "No" responses depending on what is most often true for the student. Form B consists of

seventy-five paired opposite statements to which students respond by selecting one of the two statements per item which is most often true for that student.

Both forms are designed to be used flexibly by a classroom teacher interested in determining the pupils' perceptions of his/her teaching behaviors. A classroom teacher can work alone or with a team-teacher, each administering the Inventory to the other's class to secure privacy for the students. Students are not asked to record their names on the Inventory, as it is to be completed anonymously. To insure that all students understand the words and to avoid confusion by students having difficulty reading, the teacher administering the inventory reads each item aloud. Although Form B is slightly more complex, it is probably the better form because it requires students to be more thoughtful in selecting responses. The "Yes" - "No" Form on the other hand tends to call forth all "Yes" responses if a child likes a teacher; thus, in the "Yes" - "No" format, pupils tend not to concentrate on the content of each item.

There is no key for the Inventory. Before administering the instrument, a classroom teacher simply marks a copy of one of two ways:

1) ideal responses the teacher wishes to be striving for in the classroom, or

2) responses which match how the teacher thinks the student will mark their Inventories.

The teacher tallies student responses and studies them in relation to his/her own responses to the same items and then the teacher prepares a list of concerns from those items where there was confusion between student perceptions and teacher perceptions. The teacher interested in improving his/her teaching behavior may choose to list and then create specific ways for changing, altering and improving teaching practices by a close examination of the areas of concern.

In-service Program Using the SDPPI

After refinement of the Inventory, Drozda issued an invitation to teacners to become involved in an in-service program utilizing the Seaberg-Drozda Pupil Perception Inventory. Basically, two types of teachers responded to the invitation -- those interested in having the researcher simply administer the Inventory to their students and those interested in some phase of follow-up in-service work with the Inventory. Approximately thirty-six classroom teachers volunteered for the first phase of the study. Only four teachers accepted the invitation for participation in in-service work. However, each of the four provided helpful insights into ways the Inventory can be used to study and change teacher performance.

Splinter, being the most enthusiastic, accepted an offer to work closely with the researcher for fifteen weeks. She wanted to explore some educational issues troubling her as a fifth grade teacher in what she referred to as an "educationally stifling school environment." Splinter volunteered because she felt the need for professional challenge, for direction in her growth as a competent classroom teacher and for additional educational and affective resources. She was eager to participate in the study and willingly devoted from five to ten hours a week for fifteen weeks of the school year.

Splinter and Drozda devised a systematic plan for examining and changing Splinter's performance in the classroom. After administering the SDPPI to her class of fifth graders and analyzing the results, Splinter prepared a list of concerns which she and Drozda studied. Although most of her students' responses could be considered positive, many of the student responses showed a discrepancy between how they perceived her performance in the classroom and how she perceived her own performance. Because of Splinter's conscientious desire to study her own classroom behavior in the hopes of improving her

teaching performance, she refined her list of concerns into a workable list of six items:

1) interpersonal relations
2) school work
3) teacher talk vs. pupil talk
4) planning
5) organization and pacing of activities
6) increased teacher awareness

During the fifteen weeks of the study, Drozda made regular visits to Splinter's classroom to consult with her, to observe classroom interactions between her and the students, to raise questions with her, to provide resource materials and ideas, and to assist her in organizing strategies for change for the next weekly period. Although Splinter and Drozda worked with a specific concern for the week, much of the growth that occurred was simultaneous -- while working on interpersonal relations, teacher talk vs. student talk came into play, as with all of the other items on her list of concerns. Early in the fifteen weeks it became obvious that improvement in one of the six areas could not be isolated from any of the other areas of concern.

Because Splinter was willing to grow and change in her concepts about teaching, she progressed rapidly in her ability to involve students in their learning experience, to re-organize the daily classroom routine, to structure the classroom furnishings, to speak to the students in a less authoritarian, commanding way, to question more effectively, to plan for more experiential learning experience, to resolve classroom conflicts with more dignity for all concerned.

Reflecting upon her experience, Splinter came to some enlightening conclusions:

1) children perceive differently from adults.
2) children determine "good" and/or "bad" teaching on the basis of how they perceive their teacher's behaviors.
3) children learn most effectively in a classroom where there is a relatively even match between teacher perceptions of teacher's behavior and student perceptions of teacher's behavior.
4) a teacher who is aware of student perceptions can operate in a way that intensifies communication, rather than hindering it.
5) a teacher who is aware of how students perceive the teacher's behaviors can manage the learning experience of the students more effectively and appropriately.

Splinter worked intensively with Drozda in a helping relationship with Drozda serving as a consultant and guide. The other three volunteers worked with Drozda in using the SDPPI to examine their teaching behavior in more independent ways requiring less commitment to the project. Even though these three participants were not as intensively involved, all three felt that awareness of their pupil's perceptions contributed to their success in improving teaching performance. Drozda saw the four participants as typical of all classroom teachers who might engage in similar in-service work. She viewed them as a "Team Worker," a "Reporter," a "Programmed Learner" and a "Drop Out."

In the study, Splinter reflected the Team-Worker type. She worked intensively with Drozda for fifteen weeks. Each of the other volunteers stayed with the study throughout the fifteen weeks but participated in less involved, different ways. For example, the Reporter worked by herself, without assistance from Drozda. Throughout the fifteen weeks, she reported to Drozda her plans, her challenges, her changes and her concerns. The Programmed Learner worked throughout the fifteen weeks on a prescribed independent "Teacher Awareness Packet" prepared by Drozda (1976) to be used in conjunction with the Four Faces of Teaching (Seaberg, 1974). All of the

Programmed Learner's participation was done without direct assistance or discussion with Drozda. The Drop Out participant found the time commitment too demanding and therefore withdrew from organized participation. However, this teacher-volunteer did comply with original plans to have Drozda administer the Inventory at the beginning and end of the fifteen weeks. In addition, this participant discussed student responses on the Inventory and turned in notes taken during early stages of the proposed participatory procedures.

Conclusions

Evaluation, diagnosis and assessment are controversial practices; and, exploration of these professional aspects through the use of pupil perceptions of the teacher's classroom behaviors is relatively untapped. Work with Splinter in this study revealed that students have an interesting, useful perspective on what classroom teachers do and that when teachers take these perspectives seriously they can take steps to improve the learning environment.

Through additional informal experimentation in other settings with students from early primary through junior high, Drozda concludes that pupil perceptions, at any grade level, are relevant sources of information for the teacher interested in self-assessment. Perceptions of pupils provide an affective mirror reflecting the impact of classroom procedures upon the feelings and motivations of students. The real question is: Do teachers have enough courage to look into the mirror?

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